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BOOKS

Inside workings of that other Soviet espionage agency

Inside Soviet Military Intelligence. Viktor Suvorov. Macmillan. 193 pages. \$15.95.

Ask the man on the street which agency of the Soviet government is responsible for espionage, and nine times out of 10 the answer will be the KGB — the Committee of State Security. That answer is not wrong, but it is incomplete. Side by side, and to a considerable extent in rivalry with the KGB in the field of espionage, is another, far less well-known agency, the Chief Intelligence Directorate of the Soviet General Staff, called for short by its initials, the GRU. A number of the most famous Soviet spies — Richard Sorge in Japan, for instance, or Whitaker Chambers in the United States — worked for the GRU. It is the GRU which systematically and all too often successfully probes the non-Soviet world for its military and industrial secrets.

A prominent Soviet military defector who uses the alias Viktor Suvorov served at one time as a GRU officer. He has now written a book that portrays the GRU in its operational and historical aspects. Readers of John Le Carre's spy thrillers will feel very much at home with Suvorov's description of GRU techniques of recruiting agents, obtaining secret military information and transmitting it by secret routes back to Moscow.

Oddly at variance with the major part of the book is a brief sketch of the history of the GRU, from its origins during the Russian Civil War (1918-1921) down to the Khrushchev era in the early 1960s. It is hard to know what to make of this "history," marred as it is with factual errors, significant omissions and dubious generalizations.

Fortunately these defects are not shared by Suvorov's account of the structure and functioning of the GRU in the contemporary world. Suvorov has a passion for organizational detail and can tell you just how many subdivisions there are

in a GRU agency and what their functions are.

A prominent theme in the book is the rivalry, at times mounting to open hostility, between the GRU and the KGB. Friction between the two agencies is inevitable, given their overlapping responsibility for espionage. As Suvorov shows, there have been a number of instances in which the KGB or its predecessors, from the Cheka to the MGB (Ministry of State Security), attempted to control, weaken or even destroy its rival. Recognizing that military intelligence is a vital element in the nation's security, however, the Communist Party leadership has always stopped the political police before it could achieve the complete destruction of the GRU.

It is in this context that one should put the case of Col. Oleg Penkovsky, a spy who transmitted to Washington valuable information on Soviet military strength during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. Suvorov considers Penkovsky a hero, and dedicates the book to his memory. (Penkovsky, according to official Soviet statements, was executed as a traitor). It is not unlikely, however, that Penkovsky, wittingly or unwittingly, was a tool of the KGB, whose primary mission was to undermine Khrushchev's belligerent stance vis-a-vis the United States, with the useful by-product, from the standpoint of the KGB, of discrediting the GRU. The final word on the Penkovsky case has not been said, and Suvorov is entitled to his views, which are shared by many Western intelligence specialists.

Taken as a whole, Suvorov's book deserves a warm welcome as the first full-length treatment of the GRU. It should not be taken as the final authority on the subject, but readers who approach it with a critical eye can learn much of value from it.

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